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ABSTRACT

Trends and projections for postsecondary enrollments in the United States are summarized. Between 1955 and 1970, degree credit enrollment more than tripled due to both a rapid rise in the population of college-age youth and an increase in the college participation rate. College attendance doubled between 1955 and 1965, and participation rates for women and blacks grew even faster. The larger part of the increase in students was accommodated by the growth of publicly-supported higher education. After the early 1970s, enrollment growth was slower, and 95 percent of the increase was due to the increased enrollment of women, many of nontraditional age. Although blacks made considerable strides, their participation rates were still lower than those of whites in 1979. It is projected that until the middle to late 1990s, the population of prime college-going ages, 18 to 24, and 25 to 34 years, will decline greatly as the children of the baby boom are replaced by the smaller cohorts born after 1965. These declines will be much greater in the Northeast and Northcentral states than in the South and West. Private education will probably be affected more by the declines than public education. Institutions that serve working adults will not experience demographically-caused decline until the late 1980s. (SW)

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A DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

HARRIET FISHLOW

Prepared for the National Commission on Student Financial Assistance

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Between 1955 and 1970 degree credit enrollment in the United States more than tripled, having grown more than 7 percent a year for fifteen years. This enormous increase was caused both by a rapid rise in the population of college age -- the first children of the baby boom reached 18 in 1964 -- and by an even more rapid increase in the college participation rate. Of the two, the increase in the college participation rate was the more important cause of growth. It doubled between 1955 and 1965, while rates for women and blacks grew even faster. The larger part of this truly phenomenal increase in students was accomodated by the growth of publicly supported higher education.

Enrollments continued to increase in the early 1970's, swelled by the maturing children of the baby boom and by increases in adult enrollment. There were signs of impending trouble, however. One was a slowdown in the growth of participation rates, mostly caused by an actual decline in youthful male rates, the other was the acceleration of the decline in births which had started in the mid 1960's. Some observers began to predict an eventual decline in enrollments by the 1980's.

After the early 1970's, enrollment growth was slower and less steady, rising just about 16 percent between 1974 and 1979. Ninety-five percent of the increase was accounted for by the increased enrollment of women, much of it by women above the traditional age of attendance.

The most recent Census survey figures show that the participation rates of men and women 18 to 24 had approached equality during the 1970's, with about 25 percent of each sex enrolled. The participation rates of women 25 to 34 had risen sharply to near equality, while the rates of women 35 and older was considerably higher than that of men. However, at all ages but the youngest (19 and under), women were more likely to be attending part-time. Although blacks had made considerable strides, their participation rates were still lower than whites in 1979.

Between now and the middle to late 1990's, the population of prime college going ages, 18 to 24 and 25 to 34, will decline greatly as the children of the baby boom are replaced by the smaller cohorts born after 1965. These declines will be much steeper in the Northeast and Northcentral states than in the South and West. If rates of attendance do not change, and there is no compelling reason to expect dramatic changes, enrollments will begin declining in those institutions designed to serve traditional age students, especially in the Northeast and Northcentral states. Private education will be affected more than public since it is concentrated in the areas of sharpest demographic decline. Institutions which serve working adults will not experience demographically-caused decline until later in the 1980's, and to the extent they serve middle aged or older adults, they may experience little or no decline.

The low point years of the 18 to 24 year old population will be in the early to middle 1990's. The effect of this trough in population enrollments may be exacerbated by a reinstitution of the military draft, since the armed forces will also be affected by the decline.

Enrollments in U S Higher Education

Demographic Overview

I YEARS OF GROWTH

A. Rapid increase - 1955 to 1970

As shown in Table I, college enrollment in the United States more than tripled between 1955 and 1970, an average growth rate of more than 7 percent a year for fifteen years.

Table I

College Enrollments by Sex, 1947 to 1979 (thousands)

Year	M	F	T	Year	M	F	T
1947	1687	624	2311	1973	4677	3502	8179
1950	1474	701	2175	1974	4926	3901	8827
1955	1579	800	2379	1975	5342	4355	9697
1960	2339	1231	3570	1976	5296	4654	9950
1965	3503	2172	5675	1977	5369	4848	10217
1970	4401	3013	7413	1978	5124	4712	9838
1971	4850	3236	8087	1979	4993	4986	9978
1972	4853	3459	8313				

College students 14 to 34 years of age. Source: Current Population Reports P20 No320 p. 62

<u>The principal cause of this enormous increase was increases in the participation rates for both sexes and at every age.</u>

At the traditional college going ages of 18 to 24, rates of participation more than doubled, from about 11 percent in 1955 to almost 25 percent by 1970. However, <u>population increase</u> in the prime college going years also contributed to the growth in enrollment. Between 1960 and 1970, the population of 18 to 24 increased 53 percent as the first of the baby boom children reached college age.

In response to this extraordinary growth in both demand and population, existing institutions of higher education expanded and new ones were established. New buildings sprang up next to ivy covered halls, teachers colleges became branches of State universities and universities and colleges appeared almost overnight where none had been before. The larger part of the student increase was accomodated by public institutions of higher education. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for the years 1955 to 1965 show that public enrollments rose 144 percent in those years while private enrollments grew 61 percent. By 1979 three fourths of all enrolled students were in publicly controlled institutions compared to 56 percent in 1955.

B Rapid Growth Slows Down - the 1970's

The rapid increases in enrollment of the late 1950's and the 1960's did not persist into the 1970's. The increases in the rate of participation, the principal engine of that extraordinary growth, slowed down, and, for 18 to 24 year olds, changed little after 1969, as Table II shows. However, the apparent lack of trend conceals some interesting variations. During the 1970's the participation rates for men fell fairly steadily from 28.9 in 1969 to 24.1 in 1979, while those of women rose from 20.9 to 24.2. Black male rates also fell a little in the 1970's, but over the two decades the gap in participation rates between the races diminished considerably. In 1960, the rate for whites aged 18 to 24 had been just above 16, more than twice as high as the 7 percent black rate. By 1979 black rates were about 19, white rates just over 24 percent.

Table II

The College Participation Rate for 18 to 24 years olds, 1950 to 1979
Source: Current Population Reports, School Enrollment, various issues.

Year	Rate	Year	Rate
1950	10.1	1971	24.7
1955	11.2	1972	24.2
1960	16.1	1973	22.9
1965	22.1	1974	23.5
1966	22.6	1975	25.2
1967	23.0	1976	25.7
1968	23.6	1977	25.2
1969	24.9	1978	24.4
1970	23.9	1979	24.2

The rate of increase of the number of 18 to 24 year olds also slowed down after 1969. The first of the children of the baby boom, which began in 1946, reached age 18 in 1964. Numbers of births had risen sharply after 1945 as millions of couples began or added to families delayed by depression and war. Although numbers born rose to a peak in the late 1950's and stayed high through the early 1960's (the baby boom lasted to 1964), the relative increase was greatest at the beginning since these first baby boom births followed the very small cohorts of the 1930's and the not much larger ones of the early 1940's.

The first years in which the baby boom generation enters a particular age group are therefore years of very rapid growth, as they replace the much smaller cohorts born in the 1930's. Growth continues once that smaller generation is replaced, since numbers born increased from the 18 years the baby boom lasted, but at a much slower pace.

By 1970 the entire age group 18 to 24 had been born in the baby boom (1946 to 1952) and their rate of increase tapered off. The college age population had grown 53% between 1960 and 1970, but was to grow only another 19 percent by 1980.

Enrollments continue to grow, however, since that age group was still growing, if more slowly, and the enrollments of adults 25 and older also increased.

In fact, during the 1970's, student over 24 accounted for an ever-increasing proportion of all enrollment. (By 1979 26.8 percent of all college students under 35 were aged 25 to 34, compared to 18.2 percent in 1970.) Most of these older students were under 35, although the number of enrolled older adults also increased. The students 25 to 34 were not just like those 18 to 24, only older, however. Some 43 percent were graduate students and about two thirds of both graduates and undergraduates were attending part time. The proportions of part timers was higher for those 35 and older, about 84 percent. For students 18 to 24, the reverse was true. About 83 percent attended full-time.

The increase in older students in the 1970's was in large part due to their rapidly increasing numbers (the first children of the baby boom reached age 25 in 1971 and the age group 25 to 34 grew 47 percent in the decade) and to a lesser extent to the increasing rate of attendance among women of this age. The male rate fell from 9.7 to 8.1 percent during the decade, while that of women rose from

5.5 to 7.5 causing the overall rate to rise from 7.5 to 7.8. Although their rates approached equality, differences remained. Women were more likely than men to be part-time (72 vs 59 percent), in community college (28 vs 21 percent) and be enrolled as freshmen or sophomores rather than juniors and seniors.

The dual reason for increase in the number of enrollments for those 25 to 34 during the 1970's was also true of those over 35 but increases in the rate was more important. The number of adults over 35 increased from 85 to 92 million and their participation rate rose from just under one and a half percent. Among older students women outnumber men by nearly two to one, having had a more rapid increase in the rate of participation during the decade.. The proportion part-time about 84 percent was the same for the two sexes. There is no published data on the class level of enrollment for adult over 35.

C Summary

In summary, the very rapid growth in college enrollments in the late 1950's and 1960's was caused by a combination of soaring participation rates, especially among those 18 to 24, and, toward the end of the period, the entrance of the children of the baby boom into the prime college going ages. Of the two, the increase in participation rates had the greater effect in increasing enrollments. Enrollment growth slowed down in the 1970's because the participation rate of the 18 to 24 year old population stopped growing and because the increase in their numbers slowed down. Enrollment of persons 25 to 34 grew in importance during the 1970's in large part because of their rapid increase in numbers, about 47 percent in the decade. Their overall rate of participation did not increase by very much. In 1979 they comprised 26.8 percent of all enrollments of persons under 35 compared with 18.2 percent in 1970.

The overall sluggishness in participation rates in the 1970's conceals a great deal of internal shift. The rates of men under 35 fell through the entire decade while that of women rose. Nearly all the increase in enrollments between 1974 and 1979 was due to the increased enrollment of women. By 1979, the participation rate of women to 18 to 24 equaled that of men, while that of women 25 to 34 approached equality. Among adults over 35, it was higher.

II PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE - the 1980's and 1990's

A Participation Rates

Writing in the early 1970's, the author of a Carnegie Commission report (More Than Survival) calculated that increases in the participation rate had been a more important cause of enrollment increase than population growth since the late 19th century. He found this to be true even in the 1960's, when the college age population soared. However, the situation was changing even as he was writing, because in the 1970's better than 90 percent of total enrollment growth, and all the enrollment growth of the 18 to 24 year olds, was accounted for by population increase.

The slow down of increases in proportion attending in the 1970's caused considerable anxiety among observers of the falling birth rate of the time. Much of the debate about whether enrollments can be maintained, or partically so, over the next 15 to 20 years concerns possible increases in participation rates which might overcome the predicted demographic decline. These arguments include whether the young, white male rate might return to its late 1960's level, as the rate of return to higher education improves for the smaller cohorts born in the later 1960's and 1970's, whether, and how much, the rates of ethnic minorities will rise, and whether the rates for women and older adults will continue to increase.

Increases in the participation rate are entirely possible, given the appropriate social and economic conditions.

Were the American economy to return to the healthy growth of the 1960's, and were progress to continue in employment possibilities for minorities and women, substantial increases in college enrollment rates would very likely if the higher rates of return to education from improvement in the economy and expanded opportunities for minorities and women were combined with ample subsidies in the form of low tutitions, generous grants and low cost loans. This was certainly the US experience in the post World War II period, and right through the 1970's.

If, on the other hand, economic stagnation persists and the costs of higher education continue to rise and government aid to dwindle, the rate may well decline.

The controversy about participation rates is the result of two uncertainties. One is the forecast of social and economic conditions. The other is the effect of the forecast condition on the demographic groups which compose potential students. The number of potential students is virtually certain, since near all who will be in college by the end of this century have already been born.

The following section will describe these virtually certain demographic changes and will discuss the debate on the future particpation rates associated with each group.

B Projections of Demographic Change

1) Projections of the Population 18 to 24

The age group of 18 to 24 is called the college age population because the vast majority of full-time, residential, that is, traditional students, in the full sense of the word, are of this age. In 1979 they comprised 83 perecnt of all full time students and 61 percent of both full-time and the "non traditional" part-time students, whose increase was so marked in the 1970's.

This age group reached a twentieth century peak in 1981 of 29.5 million persons. The Census Bureau projects a fifteen year decline of some 22 to 23 percent. If correct and nearly everyone who will be of this age in 1996 had been born when the projection was made there will be a decline of nearly 7 million by 1996. An upturn will begin in 1997 and by 2000 there will be about 26 or 27 million persons in this age group.

Some observers think there is a possibility of increase in the participation rate of 18 to 24 year olds, since they believe that the rate of return to higher ducation will be greater for the relatively small, and hence scarce cohorts born in the later 1960's and 1970's than it is for the baby boom cohorts. If male rates return to the levels of the late 1960's, and female rates maintain their current equality and rise along with them the demographic decline will be substantially if not completely offset.

However, this age group will have an increasing proportion of blacks and Hispanics, whose enrollment rates are now lower than that of whites. One of the assumptions often made by those who predict higher rates is that the attendance of blacks and Hispanics will continue to increase as they, or at least black rates, have (data on Hispanics is scanty), for the last two decades. At present, there is no difference between white and black participation rates within the same family income groups (for dependent high school graduates). The overall difference comes from the concentration of blacks in the lowest income groups, since college attendance is positively related to family income, and to the lower levels of high school graduation among both Hispanics and blacks, very likely also related to income.

Since minorities generally suffer more than whites from hard economic times, further substantial improvement in their enrollment rates may depend on an improved economy, if indee family income is causally related to enrollment in college. In addition to the effect of general economic conditions, black children have suffered more than white children from the economic effects of the sharp rise in single parent families in the 1970's. Expectations of continued substantial enrollment increases may turn out to be too optimestic, especially if changes in family structure impede black children from fully sharing in such gains as do occur in black income.

2) Projections of the Age Group 25 to 34

The population 25 to 34 began to increase rapidly in the early 1970's as the first baby boom children reached their middle 20's. By 1979, this age group reached 35 million and was 47 percent larger than it had been in 1970 when it contained just over 25 million people. It will continue to grow, if more slowly, until 1989, when the census projects 41.2 million person 25 to 34. This age group, from which most "older" students come, will decline right through the 1990's. By the year 2000 there will be nearly 7 million fewer 25 to 34 year olds than in 1989, a decline of 16 percent. The younger members of the age group, those 25 to 29, who are nore likely to be attending college than those in their early 30's will peak in numbers in 1986 and decline 21 percent by century's end.

One of the arguments supporting an offset to the demographic decline of the traditional college age population is that the older adult population who have supplied a growing portion of enrollments in the 1970's will increase substantially as the number of younger students drop. However, most "non traditional" students are in the next older age bracket, 25 to 34, which will begin to decline by the 1990's. Also, the participation rates of this group have scarcely risen at all. The noticeable increase in women students of this age has been just about balanced by a decline in the proportion of male students. Furthermore, unlike younger students, older students are mostly part-timers.

Substantial increases in participation rates for this age group do not appear probable, although, as with younger students, improved economic circumstances with a consequent increase in the rate of return to higher education or further training (a sizeable proportion of older students are graduate students) could have some effect. However, the increase in the female rate is bound to be dampened as more and more young women attend at the traditional age rather than waiting until their late 20's or early 30's. The increase in employment opportunities for women in the 1970's caused an increase in college attendance among women of all ages.

As the new opportunities become a standard and recognized part of the culture, more and more women will acquire their education at the same time men do, and at the same level. The market for the "returning" woman will shrink as fewer will have left in the first place. There is no compelling reason to believe that the rates from either sex will be much higher than the male rate is at present, barring substantial economic change.

3) Projections of Adults 35 and older

The first children of the baby boom reached age 35 in 1981. The entrance of the first baby boom children into early middle age, will cause the age group 35 to 44, to grow rapidly. The age group 35 to 44 will increase 42 percent in the 1980's and will continue to grow through the 1990's, although not as rapidly.

Data for college students age 35 and older has only been available since 1972. Between that year and 1979, degree credit enrollments for those over 35 rose 79 percent, from 783,000 to 1,402,000. The number of persons at that age rose 7 percent, the rest of the increase was caused by an increase in the participation rate from one to one and a half percent. Most of the increase in the rate resulted from an increase in the rate for women, which doubled, from 0.9 to 1.8 percent between 1972 and 1979. In 1979 there were 914,000 women and 487,000 men 35 and older enrolled in programs leading to college degrees. Most older students of both sexes were between 35 and 44, and most (83 percent) were attending part-time.

Further increases in the rate for this group are entirely possible during the 1980's because of the new opportunities for women which were not available when this group was of "college age" and because of increased pressures for women to take paid employment. However, the overall rate is likely to remain low, given the difficulties of college attendance for those with the myriad responsibilities so common in middle age.

4) Summary of Projections by Age

The populations of prime college going age, those 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 will suffer declines over lengthy periods of the next two decades as the baby boom children advance toward middle age. The population 18 to 24 will decline by about 7 million, or 22 percent, tetween 1981 and 1996. Between 1989 and 2000 the 25 to 34 year old group also decline by 7 million. The younger members of this age group those 25 to 29, who are more likely to be in college, will peak in numbers in 1986 and decline 21 percent by century's end. On the other hand those 35 to 44 will increase rapidly in the 1980's

and their growth will continue through the 1990's.

There is no compelling reason to expect sizable increases in participation rates that will overcome the demographic declines projected for the next two decades, although they could occur. However even if there is no change in rates, the decline in total enrollments will be much moderated by the shifts in the age structure, with some age groups growing while others decline.

If participation rates remained constant at the 1979 level, total enrollments would decline scarcely at all in the 1980's and only about 6 percent by the mid 1990's, as shown in Table III. However, since older students are more likely to be part-time, there would be a larger decline in full-time equivalency (FTE) enrollments, which is the bread and butter of tuition and budget calculations. If current age-specific part-timers rates and part-time/full-time ratios remains constant, along with participation rates, the decline in FTE would be six percent in the 1980's and eleven percent by the mid 1990's. Still, that is a far cry from the all-things-being equal enrollment decline of the 18 to 24 year old population alone.

Table III
Summary of Enrollment Prospects

1979 enrollment rates by age		Projected Enrollments* if 1979 rates prevailed				
		1979	1985	1990	1995	2000
14-17	1.9	318	283	243	270	305
18-19	33.5	2868	2460	2410	2175	2598
20-21	27.8	2389	2249	2032	1807	2011
22-24	14.9	1809	1849	1586	1524	1440
25-29	9.3	1716	1914	1876	1643	1532
30-34	6.1	1010	1176	1276	1250	1097
35-39	4.2	571	725	809	877	858
40-44	2.9	334	409	503	560	606
45-49	2.0	224	231	278	341	380
50-54	1.2	141	131	137	275	338
55-64	0.5	105	108	104	103	116
TOTAL		11,584	11,535	11,254	10,825	11,281

*product of 1979 rates and Census projected population by age (P25 #704 Series II)

Full Time Equivalency (FTE) Enrollments @

8792	8624	8257	7816	8040

@ assuming percent part-time, by age and part-time/full-time ratio remain at 1979 levels

	Percent Changes			
	1979-85	1985-90	1990-95	1995-2000
Head count Enrollments	+ 0.44	- 2.44	- 3.81	+ 4.21
FTE	- 1.91	- 4.26	- 5.35	+ 2.87

C Divergent Futures

The more moderate projects declines in enrollment which result from including students of all ages in the calculation does not offer the same reasurance to all interested parties, however.

The demographic changes described above are all national in scope. Because of differential migration some states and regions will experience much sharper than average declines in their 18 to 24 year old populations and much lower increases (and earlier decline) in the older age groups. In addition, the mission of many institutions is almost exclusively concentrated on the younger age groups. This is particularly true of residential four year colleges, especially those located away from urban areas where commuting would be inconvenient.

As far as regional differences go, the Northeast and Northcentral states will suffer larger declines and smaller, and shorter, increases than the South and West. The differential decline in the younger population is indicated by the 1979 projection of high school graduates done by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. These showed a decline of 18 percent between 1979 and the middle 1980's for the United States as a whole, but 22 to 23 percent declines for the Northeast and Northcentral states and 12 to 14 percent declines for the South and West.

The low point for the nation, and for the South an West, was projected to be 1991, with declines of 26 percent for the country as a whole, but only 13 to 16 percent for the South and West. The Northeast and Northcentral states will continue declining to 1994 and in that year they are projected to have 32 to 40 percent fewer high school graduates than 1979.

The Census Bureau's illustrative state projections, also done in 1979, shows that the Northeast and Northcentral states would, depending on the assumptions used, have 10 to 14 percent more 25 to 34 year olds in 1990 than they had in 1980 and the South and West would have 15 to 17 percent more. Declines would be steeper after 1990 in the Northeast and Northcentral states, so that by 1995 they would have 0 to 4 percent more people in this age group than in 1980,

but the South and West would have 8 to 11 percent more. Comparison of their projection for 1980 with the actual 1980 Census count shows and overestimation for the Northeast and Northcentral states and and underestimation for the South and West of the 25 to 34 year old populations, so the differences if anything are likely to be steeper than the projection indicated.

Private education will be affected more than public because it is concentrated in the areas of greatest demographic decline, the Northeast and Northcentral states.

Except for the most prestigious and well-endowed institutions, private colleges serving a young, residential population will be under stress nearly everywhere, and in the area of their greatest concentration most of all.

D External Contingencies

Most of the discussion in this paper assumed there would be no radical social or economic changes ove the next 15 to 20 years. However, one change, which is not unlikely, and which would have a very direct effect on enrollments should be discussed. That change is a reinstitution of the peace time draft. A reinstitution of the draft is not unlikely because it would arise from the very condition which so concerns the higher education community, the decline in the 18 to 24 year old population.

The effect of the draft on enrollments, if it is reinstituted, depends very much on how it is administered.

A random call-up would have adverse effects through reducing the pool, at least at first. The effect would be reduced over time if college attendance was merely delayed. A system of deferrments and GI Bill type benefits would moderate the immediate effect and might increase enrollment in the long run.

Note:

The principal data sources for this paper include:

US bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports:
1) School Enrollment - Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1979, and earlier. Series P20 #360 and earlier

2) Population Estimates and Projections, Series P25 #704.

3) Illustrative Projections of State Populations by Age, Race, Sex: 1975 to 2000, Series P25 #'s 796 and 721.

4) Population Characteristics, Population Profile of the United States: 1979 Series P20 #350.

5) Consumer Income; Money Income of Families and Persons in the United States: 1979 Series P60 # 129.

National Center for Education Statestics Projection of Education Statistics to 1988-89.

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education High School Graduates: Projections for the Fifty States.

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Hariett Fishlow

FROM: Douglas N. Ross

DATE: August 27, 1982

RE: Editorial Follow Up on Commission Paper

We are planning to use portions of your paper on demography as part of a background synthesis delineating the Commission's mandated tasks.

Those segments of your paper not included in this synthesis will be reserved for use in other Commission publications.

Right now we are in urgent need of footnotes, bibliographies (the bibliography should include author, title, place of publication, publisher, and year of publication), and a Fact Summary of one to two pages. This fact summary should be a listing of only the most significant points in your paper, whether statistical or descriptive. Such a listing will help the reader focus on the critical highlights in your subject are and help us develop a forceful, thoughtful document. Since you have already provided the Commission with footnotes and a bibliography, what we need is the Fact Summary.

Please send us these materials as soon as you can, especially the Fact Summary which we will use as a guide in creating your section of the report.

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